

# The Karmic Law in Buddhism

## *Cullakammavibhanga Sutta*

(MN. 3, 135 sutta)

When we learn Buddhism, we learn several main topics like, karma & rebirth, four noble truths, eight fold path, four fold mindfulness, the dependent origination, five aggregates, five hindrances, three characteristics. Among them karma is a very important and attractive topic that many religions have described. Many teachings can be seen in Buddhism about karma and its effect to our life. Cullakammavibhanga sutta is one of the main discourses which has described karmic effects to our life with details.

This cullakammavibhanga Sutta was preached when the Buddha was living at Savastthi in Jeta's Grove. One day, a Brahmin student, Subha went to the Buddha and exchanged greetings with the Buddha. After finishing it, he sat down at the Buddha and asked the Buddha;

Bhante Gotama, what is the reason and condition that human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? Subha asked further "Lord Buddha; There are many variations in the world.

Some die early, some live long. (*Dissanti hi, bho gotama, manussā appāyukā, dissanti dīghāyukā*)

Some are unhealthy, some are healthy. (*Dissanti bavhābādhā, dissanti appābādhā*)

Some are ugly, some are beautiful. (*Dissanti dubbaṇṇā, dissanti vaṇṇavanto*)

Some are uninfluential, some are influential. (*Dissanti appesakkhā, dissanti mahesakkhā*)

Some are poor, some are rich. (*Dissanti appabhogā, dissanti mahābhogā*)

Some are born in low cast, some are born in high cast. (*Dissanti nīcakulīnā, dissanti uccākulīnā*)

Some are unwise, some are wise. (*Dissanti duppañṇā, dissanti pañṇavanto*)

Lord Gotama, what is the reason for these variations? (*Ko nu kho, bho gotama, hetu ko paccayo yena manussānaṃyeva satam -manu-sa-bhūtā-naṃ dissanti hīnappaṇītātā*”ti)

Then the Buddha explained that the reason for these differences is the Karma, and Karma divides beings as high and low (*Kammam satte vibhajati yadidam hinappnītataya*). Karmic results follow us as a shadow in this life and from birth to birth according to its strength up to the final life until we attain enlightenment. In this situation, the Buddha has explained here how Karma affects our life, and how important it is.

Killing living beings causes to die early. Also, saving others' lives causes to live long. Injuring beings with the hand or weapons causes to having a lot of sicknesses and deceases in the Samsaric journey. Not injuring beings and helping them with health care cause to receive good

health. Living with anger causes to be reborn ugly. Practicing loving kindness causes to be reborn beautiful. Further, jealousy that doesn't like others' success causes to be reborn as uninfluential persons. Living with joyful mind (*Mudita Cetasa*) that always wishes other success causes to be reborn as influential persons. Stealing others' wealth and not offering something others cause to be reborn in poor families. Protecting others wealth and donations and generosity cause to be reborn in rich families. Further neglecting others causes to be reborn in low casts. Respecting and honoring others bring us births in high casts. If someone doesn't discuss with wise people, it causes to be reborn stupid. Simultaneously, discussing with wise people searching the world reality and meditating purifying mind cause to be reborn as wise people. Thus the Buddha pointed out causes and conditions which cause to be reborn in low and high and how far the Karmic law effects our entire life.

When we discuss the karmic law in Buddhism, both action (karma or Kamma) and its effect (Vipaka) should be described according to the Buddhist view of perspective. An action has a result only when it is done consciously. Here attention is a very necessary condition. If we do something without attention, it doesn't have a result. If someone does something with attention physically, verbally or mentally, its results come in this life or here after according to that action's strength.

Kamma or action, that Buddhism explains, means whatever someone does physically, verbally or mentally with a conscious mind. Kamma always relates to its result (Vipaka). Every action which is related to the mind has a reaction. Just action isn't kamma. Here the intention is a very essential and important fact in the Karmic law. When we do activities physically, verbally or mentally, that is Karma. Also results come to us as its effects. According to Buddhism, Kamma occurs when we do it consciously with intention. That is why the Buddha asserts intention (mental formation) is karma which brings results (*Cetanaham Bhikkhave Kamma Vadami*). Whatever seeds we sow, we will receive the same type of crops. Karma theory is also of this nature. Whatever we do with intention in the present, its result (Vipaka) comes to us in the future. Karmic results come to us according to the nature of the action. Some results of Karma come in this life, and some come in future lives according to its strength. This is a process of mind and body as well as the universal law. It occurs as a cause and effect theory. It is not god's will or any other power. It is not even the Buddha's creation. It is only a Buddhist explanation and discovery by the Buddha's intelligence. Buddhism points out very clearly whether a Buddha appeared or not, this reality is forever in the world. If we are intelligent, we should be clever to get the benefits by practicing Karmic theory into the correct way wisely. Here, knowing the Buddha's message for Karma is very important for our correct understanding. Comprehension of Karmic law is the first step of wisdom which leads to get rid of suffering.

There are some phenomena (Mind, world, beings, the Buddha and Karma) that can't be thought up to end. Karma and its results is one of unthinkable to end. However, learning about Karma and its effects is one of the main doctrines in Buddhism. That is why the Buddha advised us to reflect on the Karma and its results always as a man or woman, lay person or monk.

**"I am the owner of actions (Kamma), the inheritor, the origin, the relation and refuge of actions. Whatever actions I perform whether good or evil, I will be their inheritor. This must be reflected upon again and again by one who has gone forth."**

Understanding of karmic law (Kammassakata Sammaditthi) is the first step of spiritual path or wisdom towards ultimate happiness. Here we have a clear understanding about Karmic force. When someone does something with a wicked mind (bad intention), he will have the bad results which bring him suffering, pain and negative results because of the polluted mind. Similarly, if someone does something with a pure mind (good intention), he will have fruitful results because of pure mind. If someone has this understanding, he or she always tries to avoid bad deeds and tries to do good deeds with pure mind as much as he or she can. We avoid bad deeds and do good deeds not only for the success of next birth but also for this life itself. With the understanding of Karmic law, we are able to know the main reason that forces our entire life.

According to Buddhism, we can see an action (or *Karma*), also we can see a reaction or result (*Vipaka*), but there is no certain person who undergoes. Every thought arises and ceases at the moment. However every thought ceases at the moment conditioning next thought which arises next moment. First thought influences to next thought, but first thought doesn't go to next thought. Our long Sansaric journey as well as this entire life exists in this way. According to conventional truth in Buddhism, we have a very long Sansaric process. Our previous actions, that we did very long time ago, can affect us in this life. Nevertheless, we have only a thought which occurs at the moment according to ultimate truth. This is the nature of the impermanence that Buddhism analyzes. This is the wonder of our life whether we like or not. This is the surprise of the life whether we know or not. This is the world truth that nobody controls. This is a non-self Karmic process. There is only a pure process depending on cause and effect (or the dependent origination).

There are four kinds of Karma.

- i. There are some Karmas that are black which consequence black results  
(*Kanham Kanhavipakam*).
- ii. There are some Karmas that are white or bright which consequence white results  
(*Sukkham Sukkhavipakam*).
- iii. There are some Karmas that are black & white which consequence black & white results  
(*Kanhasukkham Kanhasukkhavipakam*).
- iv. There are some Karmas that are neither black nor white which consequence neither black & white results (*Akanha Asukkham Akanha Asukkhavipaka*).

The black or evil Karmas, which someone does with an impure mind physically, verbally or mentally, produce black results. According to black Karmas we are born in a hell among four hells, and we suffer for a long time. That is why the Buddha always advised us kindly not to do any evil as his first advice (*Sabba papassa akaranam*)

The white or wholesome Karmas those we do completely with a pure mind as merit physically, verbally or mentally, consequence is white results. As the result of good karma or merit, we can be born in the heavenly realms or brahma realms with luxurious comforts and can live for a long time. Here the Buddha encouraged us to do good deeds (*kusalassa upasampada*) as generosity, morality and meditation with pure mind. Beings who are born in heavenly realm don't need to earn their essentials. According to their psychic energy that they accumulated in their previous lives as Karma, whatever they need appear in front of them. They have no problems that human beings have such as old age, illness and physical death.

Further, as the results of Karmas that are black & white which produce black & white results, we are born in human realm where we experience a mixture of good and bad results. Although they have black and white results, this life is beneficial to develop one's mind to the maximum level because a lot of difficulties can be seen in the human realm such as illness, old age and death. Among those challenges people who are intelligent and have enough courage can end suffering achieving enlightenment. That is why all Buddhas appear in the human realm. After someone developed his mind to the maximum level, he is honored by men even deities and Brahmas.

Even before the Buddha appeared in the world, some religious teachers such as **Niganttha Nathaputta** also had discussed about Karma and rebirth, but they described karmic law depending on a permanent ego concept. The especial thing that Buddhism points out is Buddhism describes Karma and rebirth depending on the Depending origination and impermanence. They had realized above three levels. However, they didn't know the fourth step those are some other karmas which bring neither black nor bright results. This fourth step can be described only by the Buddha or his learned disciple. These karmas result to overcome rebirth ending the sansaric journey. Here the Buddha has pointed out to practice the seven enlightenment factors. They are;

1. The enlightenment factor of mindfulness (*Sati Sambojjhangha*)
2. The enlightenment factor of Keen investigation (*Dhammavicaya Sambojjhanga*)
3. The enlightenment factor of energy (*Viriya Sambojjhangha*)
4. The enlightenment factor of rapture (*Peeti Sambojjhangha*)
5. The enlightenment factor of tranquility (*Passaddhi Sambojjhangha*)
6. The enlightenment factor of concentration (*Samadhi Sambojjhangha*)
7. The enlightenment factor of equanimity (*Upekkha Sambojjhangha*)

These seven enlightenment factors directly cause to reduce defilements/ unwholesome thoughts. Beings go from birth to birth because of negative emotions such as desire, anger and especially delusion which disturb peace of mind. To cultivate the seven enlightenment factors, right mindfulness which is divided into four should be practiced. They are the contemplation of body, feelings, mind and mental formations. When someone practices mindfulness, the seven enlightenment factors gradually increase. Practicing mindfulness is the direct path to achieve enlightenment overcoming suffering. The Buddha especially encouraged his disciples to do actions which consequence neither black nor white results.

At the very beginning, we have to overcome evil which brings us suffering. In the second step, we have to do good deeds such as generosity, virtue and meditation. Having a lot of merit as practicing good help us to live with a lot of facilities in human and heavenly realms. Conversely, Buddhism always encourages us to do the Karmas which cause us to overcome the Sansaric journey. Here we have to practice both the tranquility (*samatha*) and the insight (*vipassana*) meditation. The purpose of tranquility meditation is to keep focusing our mind in a particular wholesome thought such as breathing or loving kindness. When we practice our mind again and again using some kinds of meditation techniques, we can concentrate our mind for a long time without defilements such as desire or anger. As a result, we gain peace of mind and purification of mind that causes our happiness. With the concentrated mind, we can focus on impermanence; arising and ceasing of five aggregates. The experience that we receive through six senses arises and ceases according to conditions at the moment. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence.** (අනුන්වා සම්භවං නුන්වා න භවිස්සති). It means if we experience something now, it was not happened in the past in the same way like now. Also present experience doesn't go to the future in the same way. This is the insight meditation which is unique only to Buddhism and it differs from all other religions and teachings. Both tranquility and insight meditations are very important for the purification of mind. When we go on this path with the knowledge of impermanence, we acquire karmas which consequence neither black nor white results. If someone practices in accordance with this message, he or she is able to get rid of all kinds of pain, sorrow and lamentation. Ending suffering is the final destination of the enlightenment path.

May the Triple Gem Bless you!

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May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

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